

Green Entrepreneurship

Successful business cases of Green Entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean



Mille Collines: High quality fashion and accessories made in Africa

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Name:	Atelier des Mille Collines
City, country:	Distributor company; Barcelona, Spain, Headquarters; Kigali, Rwanda, Branch in Kenya.
Name of entrepreneur/ founder:	Marc Oliver and Inés Cuatrecasas

Description:	A social company that carries out the design, production and distribution of high quality fashion products -clothing and accessories- used as instruments to increase awareness on the potential and capacities of Africa. Activities are coordinated from a workshop in Rwanda with two stores in Africa (Kigali, Rwanda and Nairobi, Kenya). Products are sold through multibrand stores in the US and Europe and sales in Spain sales are organized through alternative channels: pop up stores - temporary unique environments that help us to engage our customers to the project and increase interaction.
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Investment:	<i>Start up capital:</i> 12.000\$ for a total of 200.000\$ <i>Rate of return:</i> Not applicable. <i>Sources of funding:</i> private funding
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Stakeholders:	Family, friends, volunteers, NGO, collaborators
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Employment generation:	20% non skilled workers 80% professionals (handcraft artisans, tailors, sales, administration...) Full time employees: 19 (skilled) 4 (non skilled).
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Timeline:	2005 concept began with a blog 2009 company launched with 3 employees 2011 shops in 3 countries with 22 employees
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Feasibility study:	Market research on the initial product with group dynamics in Spain and East Africa, 2 pilot collections to test in trade show in Paris "prêt-a-porter."
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Key features:	Conscious consumption, economic development, education
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Overall rational and motivation:	A desire to provide solutions to social problems, achieved through a sustainable business model and empowering the consumer of her capacity to change the market through the following two messages: (1) <i>high quality and desirable products can be made in Africa.</i> (2) <i>Betting for quality, durability and meaningful products enhances a conscious consume.</i> The company also aims to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Rwanda, proving stable incomes and access to health insurance to employees.
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Strengths:	The team and the brand, differentiated by a quality service, shop experience and community building not only in East Africa with also abroad in other stockists.
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Challenges and constraints:

Logistics, Production takes place in Rwanda, a land locked country which makes transport more expensive. Production capacity: sometimes we've had to refuse orders because our client's minimum order quantities were too high for our productive teams.

Direct activities and Impacts:

Social: emancipation for women (through our collaboration with local women cooperatives in the creation of handcraft products and processes. Health (our fix employees have access to health insurance for themselves and their families.) Education (all our team takes part in several training courses with professionals from the fashion industry coming from abroad. E.g. pattern maker expert comes once a year.) The team takes part in most of the important decisions and changes in the project.

Environmental: No information provided.

Economic: with our product we are increasing the awareness on the potential and capacities of the African countries where we have presence in today.

Use of innovative Technologies:

The company uses innovative distribution strategies for this type of product, aiming to change the way African products are perceived to local and international consumers. Rwandan population awareness on the capacities and potential of their country and will inspire them to improve, risk and succeed. Unlike other similar initiatives, Mille Collines has bet for the African market as one of its main strategies of distribution enabling control of the visibility of the brand, the message and the quality of the service. Mille collines' team has always believed that change must start at the origin. Selling an African brand in Africa makes it belong. The concept becomes familiar and the initiative generates curiosity, pride and hope. In Spain sales are through an alternative channel: pop up stores; temporary unique environments that help us to engage our customers to the project and increase interaction.

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(1) Team: the company started in April 2009 with 3 employees. After 2 years we are 22 full time employees and 7 part time. We started working with 20 people from 2 different cooperatives, today with 248 artisans from 4 cooperatives. (2) Sales. We have grown a 60% in the distribution to multibrand stores, selling in Macy's and collaborating with Anthripologie. Both company stores are profitable and increasing in sales, with two more to be opened in the next 6 months (Mombasa, Kigali). (3) Communication: We have increased notably the visibility of the brand, have been interviewed by several blogs, newspapers and local TV channels, and have been writing a blog since 2005. Our facebook page counts today with more than 700 fans.

Policies, incentives and regulations needed:

Logistics: a railway connecting Dar es salaam (Tanzania) and Kigali (Rwanda) is being planned.

Lessons and recommendations:

Never lose passion in the work you are doing, if so, reconsider your priorities. Study you markets with great detail / don't lose quality as you increase sales and visibility / make your team a part of the designing process

References:

Andrew Mwenda - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Mwenda

Veja brand - www.veja.fr www.millecollines.es

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID4m3fp5CQs>

http://issuu.com/millecollines/docs/mille_collines